

CLAIMS

1. A process for the production of a food product comprising the steps of:
 - (i) contacting a food material with a stabiliser to provide a food intermediate;
 - 5 and
 - (ii) fermenting the food intermediate;wherein the stabiliser comprises a depolymerised pectin and wherein the food material comprises a protein.
- 10 2. A process according to claim 1, further comprising, before step (ii), the step of (i)(a) pasteurising the food intermediate.
3. A process according to claim 1 or 2, further comprising, before step (ii), the step of (i)(b) inoculating the food intermediate.
- 15 4. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 3 comprising, in the following order, the steps of:
 - (i) contacting a food material with a stabiliser to provide a food intermediate;
 - (i)(a) pasteurising the food intermediate;
 - 20 (i)(b) inoculating the food intermediate; and
 - (ii) fermenting the food intermediate.
5. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 4 further comprising the step of (iii) pasteurising the product of step (ii).
- 25 6. A process according to any one of the preceding claims further comprising the step of (iv) adding juice and/or acid to the product of step (i)(b) and/or to the product of step (ii) and/or to the product of step (iii).
- 30 7. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin has a viscosity at 25°C in a 5% solution of 15 cP to 400 cP.
8. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin has a viscosity at 25°C in a 5% solution of 20 cP to 200 cP.

9. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin has a viscosity at 25°C in a 5% solution of 25 cP to 50 cP.
10. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin is an essentially linear carbohydrate polymer.
11. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin has a galacturonic acid content of at least 65%.
12. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification at least 50%.
13. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of from 50 to 85%.
14. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of from 65 to 75%.
15. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 11 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of less than 50%.
16. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 11 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of from 20 to 50%.
17. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the protein is of animal origin and/or vegetable origin and/or microbial origin.
18. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the protein is of animal origin.
19. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the protein is a milk protein.
20. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food material comprises milk.

21. A process according to claim 20 wherein the milk has a milk solid non-fat content of 0.1 to 25 wt%, preferably 3 to 25 wt%, more preferably 9 to 25 wt%.
- 5 22. A process according to any one of claims 2 to 21 wherein the pasteurising step (i)(a) takes place at a temperature of at least 80°C, preferably about 95°C.
23. A process according to any one of claims 2 to 22 wherein the pasteurising step (i)(a) takes place over a period of 5 to 15 minutes, preferably about 10 minutes.
- 10 24. A process according to any one of claims 3 to 23 wherein the inoculation step (i)(b) comprises the addition of a live food-grade micro-organism.
25. A process according to claim 24 wherein the live food-grade micro-organism is a
15 probiotic bacterium.
26. A process according to claim 24 or 25 wherein the live food grade micro-organism is selected from the list consisting of *Bifidobacteria*, *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactobacilli* and mixtures thereof.
- 20 27. A process according to claim 24, 25 or 26 wherein the live food grade micro-organism is selected from the list consisting of *Bifidobacteria*, *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactobacillus casei*, *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and mixtures thereof.
- 25 28. A process according to any one of claims 24 to 27 wherein the live food grade micro-organism comprises *Streptococcus thermophilus* and *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*.
29. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the fermentation
30 step (ii) takes place at a temperature of from 30 to 50°C, preferably from 37 to 43°C.
30. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the fermentation step (ii) takes place over a period of 2 to 48 hours.

31. A process according to any one claims 5 to 30 wherein the pasteurising step (iii) takes place at a temperature of at least 80°C, preferably about 90°C.
- 5 32. A process according to any one claims 5 to 31 wherein the pasteurising step (iii) takes place over a period of 5 to 30 seconds, preferably 10 to 20 seconds.
33. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food product is a beverage.
- 10 34. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food product is a fermented milk drink.
35. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food product is a yoghurt drink.
- 15 36. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food product is a drinking yoghurt drink.
- 20 37. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 32 wherein the food product is a stirred yoghurt.
38. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food product contains a live food-grade micro-organism in an amount of from 0.01 to 0.03 wt%, preferably about 0.02 wt%.
- 25 39. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food product contains the stabiliser in an amount of 0.3 to 3.0 wt%.
- 30 40. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the food product has a pH of less than 4.6.
41. A process for the production of a food product comprising the step of dissolving a stabiliser directly in a food material wherein the stabiliser comprises a depolymerised pectin and wherein the food material comprises a protein.
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42. A process according to claim 41 wherein the stabiliser is in a solid form.
43. A process according to claim 41 or 42 wherein the food material comprises milk.
- 5 44. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the depolymerised pectin is amidated.
- 10 45. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the stabiliser comprises a blend of two or more depolymerised pectins.
46. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the stabiliser comprises a blend of a HE depolymerised pectin and a LE depolymerised pectin.
- 15 47. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the stabiliser comprises a blend of a LE amidated depolymerised pectin and a HE depolymerised pectin.
48. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the stabiliser further comprises a high molecular weight pectin.
- 20 49. A process according to any preceding claim wherein the stabiliser comprises a HE depolymerised pectin and a high molecular weight pectin.
50. A food product obtained or obtainable by the process of any one of the preceding
- 25 claims.
51. Use of a stabiliser for improving the texture and/or viscosity of a food product, wherein the stabiliser comprises a depolymerised pectin.
- 30 52. Use according to claim 51 wherein the stabiliser further comprises a high molecular weight, high ester pectin.